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Extension Programs and Responsibilities for Education on  
The Place and Function of Cooperatives in Our Economy

by  
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Is there anyone here who does not know what an elephant looks like? That's a silly question you say—and yet this year, 1952, there will be over 2 million people in the United States who for the first time will learn what an elephant looks like. We forget that education is a never-ending process to be carried on before the parade of each succeeding generation. Extension's job is education.

Extension is inextricably intermingled with the Land-Grant College system. It cannot be separated from research and classroom instruction. Therefore, my remarks will apply to the entire college program rather than just one segment.

I remember, in 1939, at the meetings of the American Institute of Cooperation at the University of Chicago, Frank Robotka made a remark to the effect that the best way to teach cooperative marketing was to teach marketing, the implication being that a broad understanding of the economic and distribution system was a prerequisite to a good understanding of cooperative marketing. It is somewhat unfair to go back 13 years and quote a man; however, if Frank has changed his mind I still string along with his original idea. It is the responsibility of the Extension Service to carry on educational work in the entire area of marketing and distribution rather than just on cooperatives alone. We have responsibilities to work with all segments of an industry.

Before discussing the positive side, let's take a few things on the negative side. Perhaps these should be headed "Some Things That Are Not the Responsibility of the Extension Service."

1. It is not the responsibility of the Extension Service to act as a propagandist for cooperatives. I have a feeling that there are a few instances where college people have acted as propagandists rather than educators. Cooperatives can stand on their own feet—they don't need that kind of help. It hurts the cooperative—it hurts the college.
2. It is not the responsibility of the college employees to be chore boys for the cooperative managers. I have observed cases where it appears that the manager was using the college staff to do jobs that should have been done by cooperative employees. In some cases this has involved using the name and the prestige of the college, rather than what the particular individual concerned can contribute.
3. It is not the responsibility of the college to perform routine services for the cooperatives. For example, in the field of accounting the college should have educational programs on the importance of good accounting procedures but should not serve as auditors. This may be a debatable point.

Now let's turn to the positive responsibilities of extension in this area.

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1. It is the responsibility of the college to provide an educational program pertaining to the place of cooperatives in our society. This also should include many other phases of cooperation. The educational programs should include (a) the college staff, (b) the adult programs and (c) a program for youth.
2. It is the responsibility of the college to have an aggressive, hard-hitting program of education, not merely to sit back and wait until somebody requests it to do something. Colleges should serve as catalysts in promoting educational meetings. They should encourage the various groups in the state to have educational programs. For example, they may cover the state with a series of meetings on the functions of the board of directors and encourage the cooperatives to join with them in this undertaking. Too often the cooperatives have had to encourage the college, rather than vice versa.
3. It is the responsibility of the college to educate the farmers, so that the farmers, not the hired employees, can run the cooperatives. That happens to be a pet peeve of mine. There are too many farm organizations in which the employees run the farmers rather than the farmers determining policies for the employees.
4. The college should conduct educational programs on the broad economic problems facing society so that the citizens can be better informed as to where their particular interest fits into the overall picture. For example, it is a responsibility of a college to point out some of the international implications of trade restrictions, especially to certain commodity groups.
5. Of course, it goes without saying that the college has a responsibility to carry on an aggressive educational program in all phases of agricultural production to promote efficient farming and the various technical skills.
6. It is the responsibility of the college to provide outlook information. This includes general business as well as commodity outlook.
7. It is our responsibility to carry out the results of research.
8. There is a responsibility to analyze the need for new marketing agencies, whether they be cooperative or private. This can include such things as the appropriate location in regard to supply.
9. Colleges should analyze trends affecting the operation of cooperatives and other marketing and distributing agencies. This includes such things as the impact of trucks, the direct marketing of livestock, the use of paper bottles in the distribution of milk, and many other factors. There have been instances in which colleges have not been aggressive enough in pointing out the impacts of changes upon the operation of marketing agencies.
10. It is the responsibility of the colleges to make business analyses that can be used in advising boards of directors and managers in the operation of their businesses.
11. After a list such as this it is perhaps unnecessary to say that it is the responsibility of colleges to have people on their staff who can give technical assistance to management. This involves a wide range of activities, such as the control of insects in the storing of grain and the proper ingredients in feed and fertilizer. It also includes people qualified to help in developing financing plans and to be of assistance on the many specialized problems with which management is confronted.

12. It is the responsibility of the colleges to train present and future employees. This involves short courses, four-year courses and graduate programs. This is a real opportunity for a few institutions to pay special attention to training students who could qualify as potential managers.

13. It is the colleges' responsibility to have enough nerve to stand up and tell the cooperatives when, in their judgment, they think the cooperatives are wrong. There have been too many cases of college people discussing things among themselves rather than discussing them with the boards of directors. Of course, in situations such as this, a reasonable amount of diplomacy is required.

Cooperatives have come of age and this requires some change in the operation of extension programs. Colleges have performed a number of services for cooperatives. Many cooperatives are now in a position to perform these services for themselves. This should release the resources of colleges to enter into new areas. Routine mass education should not be neglected, but perhaps more emphasis should be placed upon providing management with information which would help it cope with the multitude of problems it faces in running its business. This may mean a change in the type of personnel used by colleges in these programs.

The Extension Service's primary function is that of education. Farmers learn by doing. In this respect cooperatives are educational tools. It is the responsibility of Extension to use this educational tool to promote a more efficient production, an improved system of distribution, and a better-informed public.

